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SUBJECT: THREE "WISE MEN" MUST SET REFORM TALKS FORMULA BY
JULY 31

REF: BRUSSELS 1099 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) King Albert II appointed three mediators to set by July 31 the terms and conditions for a resumption of institutional reform talks. They will try to set a format and timetable for the talks on the regional level, as well as find some way to guarantee to those concerned the talks will be productive. The three "wise men" already started their political consultations on the somber and rainy National Day July 21. During his traditional national day address, King Albert steered clear of political pitfalls, using the fifteenth anniversary of the death of his brother King Baudouin to focus on social themes dear to the late King. The only vague reference to the political crisis came when the King said that "we (the Belgians) have to invent new forms of living together."

¶2. (SBU) The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), PM Leterme's ally, has already threatened to no longer support the government if by July 31 no firm guarantees for a serious institutional discussion are on the table. Since King Albert refused Leterme's resignation, the federal government is back in business and it is fully empowered, though the ministers are currently observing self-imposed restrictions. The Prime Minister will appear before Parliament to answer questions July 23 and perhaps one more council of ministers meeting will be held before the summer recess. The ministers are planning to take a short vacation in early August, provided the mediators have found guarantees for continuing the institutional discussion.

¶3. (SBU) The three Francophone mediators are: Christian Democratic (CDH) Minister of State Raymond Langendries, currently a member of the European Parliament. He is a former President of the House of Representatives and former civil service minister. He is currently mayor of Tubize, a municipality south of Brussels;

Liberal (MR) Minister of State Francois-Xavier de Donnea is a member of the House of Representatives for Brussels. He is a former Defense Minister, former Minister-President of the Brussels regional government, and former mayor of Brussels city; and,

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, the Socialist (PS) Minister-President of the German-language Community. He has the honorary title of Minister of State.

FOX